

Bunbilla yarnteen ngurra-yelleeke (Listen everyone and take note)

Wurreker

Newcastle Aboriginal Support Group

Newsletter No. 124

June 2000

Corroboree 2000

The March

The 28th May will become another significant date on my calendar, an anniversary of a time of rare unity and shared joy. This march was an expression of goodwill, a spontaneous outpouring of friendship and solidarity, remarkable for the high spirits and good humour of all the marchers and onlookers.

The crowded train, the snails' pace movement through the packed North Sydney Station, the Port-a loo queues stretching down a lane outside, people searching in vain for their groups, the bitter wind on the bridge — it reads like a recipe for disaster. But miraculously everyone was so delighted to be a part of that vast crowd that nothing was a trouble and strangers greeted each other with happy smiles. Many people sought out Aboriginal walkers to say their own personal "Sorry" and everyone cheered at the sight of that word floating above us in the sky.

There were old people, family groups with babies and toddlers, school kids marching under their school banners, young adolescents singing and chanting, Asians and Pacific Islanders walking with the usual white majority. It was a great cross-section of Australian society. But best of all there were the Kooris, walking proudly, the focus of the march. They knew that the hundreds who marched were there to show their wish for reconciliation and their determination to make this day the start of a better way of life. They must know too that for every person who attended, there were a hundred who could not be there physically but accompanied them in spirit.

Some banners said "Forget about that mean little man. We are sorry. We want true reconciliation". That was why we were there, and this varied crowd of well-wishers all walking and thinking in unison gave the lie to the parliamentarians who state that the great majority agreed with their policies on the Stolen Children, Native Title, Mandatory sentencing, pastoral leases and the need for an official apology.

But it would be foolish to think that the future will be all roses because of the success of Corroboree 2000. Racism is still a deep-seated poison festering away in many places. But this should be regarded as the first new step towards a better Australia. Many people are now intent on showing their appreciation and respect for our first inhabitants, realising that

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Mick Dodson about the March

"I urge you to see this day as the beginning of the reconciliation process. There is much work to do. We have to stoke the fires in our bellies, get our hearts burning and yearning for reconciliation. Let us smash the mould of assimilation that afflicts my generation of politicians. The capacity to embrace the past honestly, and acknowledge its truths, goes to the very depths of our national identity and what we stand for as peoples. We must rid ourselves of this psychological cloak of darkness before it becomes our shroud.

If we cannot acknowledge the truths of our past, there is no hope for our future as a nation. We are all Australians and call this home. Let us rejoice in our diversity and difference because it is they that will enrich us. It is who we are and where we want to be that will ultimately give us the strength, wisdom, inspiration and the generosity to get the job done.

So let us begin this journey. A journey of healing the body, soul, hearts and spirit of our nation. In the words of Sir Gustav Nossal, reconciliation must go on as a people's movement. It must go on with the education of young people. It must go on with telling the truth about Aboriginal history. It must go with fights against racism on the ground. We can't fold up our tents and go home just because John Howard won't apologise. This is something for ordinary Australians.

Finally, we must have a treaty. That should be the central objective of the Reconciliation Foundation. It will build on the people's movement and I hope in my heart of hearts it will bring forth the people's leaders we so desperately need. Above all, it will finish the unfinished business. It is not a big ask. It's something that Australians are eminently capable of doing. It is abundantly clear to me that a lasting reconciliation can only be secured by going down this path. Let us begin that journey, the people's journey, no matter how long it takes."

This is an extract from *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 May 2000 (an edited text by Dr Mick Dodson to Corroboree 2000).

Pat Cameron



Memories of Silver City Mission

The highlight of our April meeting was a talk given by Ray Kelly, that master of storytelling, drama, song and dance who took his audience on a journey to a small community living on the old mission outside Armidale. Through the eyes of a young boy we glimpsed wonderful people and a way of life now gone.

Ray began his talk with a tribute to Moya, his “farewell to a sister, a mentor, a friend” who had been always ready to listen and who had done so much, not only to foster understanding and reconciliation, but to ensure that our organisation gave practical help as well as vocal support to Aboriginal initiatives.

His story began as he sketched a map of the little houses clustered on the Government reserve, between the old dump and the new. He told us of the people who lived in each house, and the place became alive with wonderful characters. There were Nan and Gran, his grandmother and grandfather in their house with the white crocheted bedspread and the walls plastered with clay and paper cut-outs to keep out the freezing winds. They told him stories and songs of the past in that welcoming place and when the unlined houses became too cold the whole village gathered around a large fire in a makeshift tin shelter outside Nan’s house. There the singing, the dance and the stories warmed and cheered them all and surely nurtured the talents of young Ray.

We heard of his great-grandfather Woods, a medicine man who could cure illness in the old way. Then there came the two brothers who lived nearby, brothers who could catch more rabbits and out-smart all the other boys on the Mission, and the almost invisible “Gung Man” (the Ghost man), and the man who kept the new dump. We got to know the three brothers who went off to the war; the one who was killed there and the other two were unceremoniously shunted back to the Mission when they returned home. They marched and wore their medals on Anzac Day but were denied all other privileges, not recognised as citizens in the country they fought for. They could not even go to the pub with those comrades they had fought alongside.

We sat fishing with Nan on the riverbank and heard her talk to the fish; we listened into the conversations with Gran by their open fire. We learnt of her Stolen Child who was whisked away by the dreaded Welfare when she was eleven to work as a servant among strange white people in Tamworth. We know where the Kelly family lived and where his Dad, his chief mentor, urged him to fix his eye on far horizons and to keep going to attain them. In that house where his baby sister died, the little boy grew up and learned not only from his own parents and Nan and Gran but from the whole rich array of characters living around.

The magic of the storyteller made these and all the other people, even the feared Welfare officer, come alive. Ray knows that although his childhood on the Mission could be considered deprived, he was nurtured by the love and attention of his parents and relatives and shared a rich community life that most people would envy. He is a playwright, song-maker and story-teller because of that boyhood.

We laughed at Ray’s stories, the Grandfather’s song about the first train, the games of cowboys and Indians, the notice

on the boundary of the neighbouring big property forbidding trespassers — (what’s this word ‘prosecuted’? Does it mean ‘shot’?) But with the laughter came the realisation of the injustice and prejudice that existed and still lingers on.

By the end of the talk, we had been through the history, the learning, the injustice the pathos, achieving an understanding far richer than a formal discourse would have given us. Nothing less than a video could do justice to this wonderful performance.

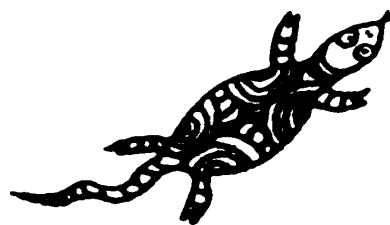
Some final quotes from Ray: “The hardest thing is to reconcile a history that is painful.”

On his reason for speaking of his childhood, “For me it is the story of connection. Now, today, I’m debriefed, but it’s not gone.”

And his advice for his people (it applies to us all): “This country needs its kids to listen to its elders.”

And we need to listen to you again, Ray. Thank you for that great experience.

Rodney Knock and Pat Keating



Aboriginal Art Exhibition

On April 15th, an Aboriginal art exhibition was opened at the Lake Maquarie Art Gallery, Awaba House, Booragul. Three people welcomed us: Debbie Abraham, gallery director; Julie Smith, on behalf of her mother, Shirley, and the mayor, Ald. Kilpatrick, who spoke with delight as an art lover who had recently enjoyed Desert Park near Alice Springs, and who praised the work being done at Koopahtoo.

After Julie had spoken of the artist’s values, of their belief in past, present and future, Bill Smith emphasised how they represented different tribes, but “we’re here as one”, honouring earth mother and father, with a “place for every race, colour, creed and denomination.” Then his dancers welcomed the Mayor, performing also boomerang and animal dances, involving a few wandering bubs and elder Cyril Archibald.

After Bill had smoked the distinguished guests, we went inside, and the shower of rain, which had delayed, fell. The bush tucker, together with more typically white man’s beverage, was scrumptious.

Of the artists whose works were represented, I particularly liked Doug Archibald’s mural at Wallsend High, which had involved student workers; Mini Heath’s variety of styles as shown in *Seeds of Life* and *Pelican*; and several striking works by Kathy Marika (who once addressed us), such as *Lizards* and *Milky Way* (Her bark paintings were sometimes on thin paper bark from the NT and sometimes thicker local eucalypt).

The hangings by Carol Hartwig, Len Leon, Cherie McLaren, Trevor Patten and Jim Ridgeway, were equally engaging and personal.

I hope you heard about this exhibition on the grapevine, or through publicity, as it will be over by the time you read *Wurreker*.

Rodney Knock

It's no Secret

by Donna Meehan

The launching of Donna's book at Pepperina's was an amazing affair. Never had so many people been sardined into this space; there was standing room only and that was a squeeze. Not even the famous names of Australian literature, media and politics drew as big an audience as did our local celebrity.

But it was not the size of the crowd that impressed us. It was the quality and diversity of those who had come to honour her. Her relatives had travelled from Coonamble, Walgett, and other western towns to join with the Newcastle mob and show how proud the Welsh family was of this woman who had fought against adversity to write their story. Mingling with them were dignitaries from politics, the Department of Education, her Church and of course the Meehan family and Donna's friends from every walk of life. And taking an honoured place among Donna's brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles was Donna's white Mum, Elizabeth Chandler, who with her then husband Tim Popov had taken the lost and bewildered little five year into their home and hearts.

The official proceedings started with a beautiful didgeridoo solo by Les Saxby and then the MC, Ken Weatherell, paid respects to the Awabakal owners of the site and welcomed everyone.

Craig Hammond read the first of three readings from Donna's book. Donna, thanking him later simply said, "His Dad knew my Mum" and we knew that Craig is one of her special people.

Dennis Carter played "Beautiful Dreamer" on the piano and those who have read the book will know that this was the song her beloved Grandfather always sang to her in the riverbank camp at Coonamble, this man who so influenced her that although she never saw him after she was taken away, she writes that "he had sealed her with his pride and love that would stay with me my entire life".

Auntie Tan, Thelma Leonard, then gave a wonderfully warm and witty talk. She spoke of her sister Beatrice, Donna's mother, and the Grandfather who had longed to see his little Donna again, and how proud they would have been of what she had done. With that Koori gift for story telling she gave us a glimpse of the Welsh family, past and present, who through all the changes over the years never lost their closeness. They were known throughout the western towns for their talent for singing and music and after hearing Auntie Tan I'd say they would be also remembered for their great sense of humour.

Then Tim, Donna's second son, joined with Reuben Andrews from the band "The Good" to play a favourite Tommy Emmanuel song. Tim played the guitar and Reuben combined the didge, clapping sticks and a zither-like instrument. I'm sorry, lads, that my knowledge of musical instruments is so poor, but I do know that that you sounded great.

A second touching musical episode came with Pastor Peter Walker singing "It's No Secret" as a tribute to Donna's work for Reconciliation and for Christianity and her belief that love can conquer all things.

Another of Donna's Aunts, Ivy Kennedy from Walgett, told of her pride in Donna and her family. She spoke of Donna's mother, Beatrice, who lost her seven children and how proud and relieved she had been when they gradually all returned; they had all survived and flourished, and now after so many years they had come home. Ivy then thanked Donna's white

Mum for caring so well for their child and presented her with a gift of flowers.

Then bouquets were showered upon the star of the show. A representative of the publishers, Random House, who sponsored the launching, spoke of the pleasure the firm had in working with Donna and presented a large floral tribute.

Another followed from the Education Department, who honoured Donna's work with them. She is so well regarded that Dr Alan Laughlan, the Assistant Director-General of Education travelled up from Sydney to attend this function. He was followed by Laurie Tabbart, the Director of the Newcastle State Education area, who praised Donna's work as the Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer, her unique sense of humour that endeared her to her colleagues in Area Office, to the teachers and the children in the schools. He admired the comforting philosophy she shares with Saint Julian of Norwich that "All will be well, and all manner of things will be well."

Then Donna embraced by her three sons and surrounded by flowers stood before us. She was overwhelmed by emotion as the boys led her to the microphone but soon was smiling as she told us of the two special teachers who told her that she must write a book one day and how her brother Barry had similarly urged her to write the story of her family. She spoke of her memories of those first wonderful years on the riverbank at Coonamble, of growing up estranged from her people and having to find her identity. But she spoke of her luck in having such a wide extended family, not only her own Aboriginal Welsh family, but the Meehans who were always so supportive and loving and the Popov Mum and Dad who reared her with love. She acknowledged the Reedmans who helped with her introduction to the white world and whose daughter, Nance Adams, who attended the launching.

We heard of her life with Ron and she repeated the message first given to her by her Uncle Bob Randall, "Love is invisible. It does not have a colour." This philosophy made her marriage to Ron a fine example of true reconciliation. Her sons, their partners and the grandchildren gave them such joy and their love enabled Donna to face Ron's death. She ended with her belief that to be a peacemaker was far more important than money or status and that "walking together" was the only way to achieve reconciliation.

The launching ceremony ended with a prayer by Pastor Ron Gibbons who welcomed all the people from so many differing backgrounds who had been drawn together by Donna. He prayed for reconciliation and peace with God and all mankind and asked a blessing on all.

Then Donna began the mammoth task of signing hundreds of books. I am not going to give a review of the book, because I know you are all going to have your own copy by now and you too will have found it engrossing. You will have envied Donna's idyllic baby-hood with her family and friends all centred around Grandfather Jim Welsh and his camp by that special tree filled with magpies and currawongs. You will have wept with the five-year old Donna on that cruel train ride, separated from her four siblings who had been whisked way to different carriages, leaving her with that dreadful "white woman with the red hat". You will know of her struggle against what she saw as abandonment and been cheered by the caring people who eventually overcame her depression and led to her reconciliation with her family.

Thank you, Donna, and congratulations. You have done so much for us all by sharing your life-story. We look forward to your next book.

Pat Keating

MOYA FARRELL

Activist for Peace and Justice

22 April 1940 –16 April 2000

Moya Farrell had a long and close association with the Aboriginal Support Group here in Newcastle and it is with great sadness that we report her death on Sunday, 16th April, 2000, a week before her sixtieth birthday.

Moya was born in Melbourne and became politically active at university joining a protest outside a South Yarra Hotel which refused to serve Pacific Islanders. With hard-hitting wit she devised a placard which read, South Africa, South USA, South Yarra. After her move to the Hunter Valley, 32 years ago, Moya and her husband, Bob Berghout, were at the forefront of making Newcastle a nuclear-free port. Her forthright action brought her into conflict with the law. She served a week in gaol in 1984 when she entered the base at Cockburn Sound, Western Australia, with other women protesting against the presence of U.S. nuclear ships. In 1987, she was arrested for trespass at Pine Gap, Northern Territory, and again in 1989 at Nurrungar, South Australia, for protesting against U.S. communications installations. Even in this heated environment, she tried to engage in dialogue with the policemen who arrested her. Moya was a great believer in conflict resolution and attended workshops in Sydney and led workshops back in Newcastle.

But it was her work bringing about a gradual change of perspective in Australia concerning the relationship between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal people that was her proudest achievement. Moya had developed a theory in 1985/86 explaining why white Australians seemed so isolated from the rest of the world and so paranoid about being invaded. She believed it stemmed from a subconscious sense of living on stolen land. Moya vigorously pursued land rights and just compensation for Aboriginal people because she considered that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians stood to benefit from a 'just settlement'.

In her work with the Aboriginal Support Group in Newcastle, Moya, like Jack Doherty, was insistent that no action should be taken without the advice of Koori people. Following wide discussion with the Aboriginal community, the Support Groups newsletter, gained its Aboriginal name, Wurreker, and with Moya's editorial guidance, became an effective means of informing local people about important issues. Moya's vision was a major factor in the Coming Together Day in 1993 resulting in thousands of people signing *The Hunter Commitment to Indigenous Australians* and encouraging the production of the Newcastle City Council's first statement on commitment. She continued to be a part of the small team that revised and renewed this commitment statement, ratified most recently in April, 1998.

Moya claimed it was cancer that gave her the freedom to become a full-time peace activist. As signs of secondaries recurred, she would undergo treatment in conventional and alternative medicine, make radical changes in diet, in exercise, in the arrangement of her time and would focus even more clearly on the injustices around her.

Moya studied and taught Co-counselling as a way of resolving personal and social problems. She used the method particularly to clarify her thinking and to promote the empowerment of vulnerable and oppressed groups of people.

She introduced co-counselling later to various Aboriginal women, many of whom were strengthened by this pattern of egalitarian consultation.

During the Palm Sunday speeches at the Foreshore in 1999, Carol Ridgeway-Bissett paid particular tribute to Moya for her work with local Aboriginal people. And when Moya was very ill, Michael Davison brought his didgeridoo and played to her in an act of love and healing. Donna Meehan, a member of the stolen generation, collaborated with Moya in giving two different perspectives of the Coming Together Day. This article appeared in a landmark book, *Novocastrian Tales*, edited by Paul Walsh, the profits of which went towards building *Yallarwah Place*, the accommodation centre for families of Aboriginal patients at the John Hunter Hospital.

Moya wrote hundreds of letters lobbying newspaper editors and politicians at all levels. She would come to meetings carrying her laptop so that the necessary letters might be written before the meeting was over. She had an excellent editorial eye and would encourage people to join together to frame letters, get them typed, printed and posted away.

In 1997, Moya aware of her declining health, decided she would hand over leadership of the Aboriginal Support Group and with that in mind, had asked different people to chair the bi-monthly meetings. 'You can do it', she said to those of us who did not have her confidence. She then opened up her busy diary and found time when she could help us learn the necessary skills. Moya was very happy when in 1998, Anne Too agreed to take over the leadership of the Support Group and become the editor of *Wurreker*.

In later years, Moya learnt to take more time to play. Her garden, her swimming, her bushwalking, her camping visits with Bob and the children to their land, near Paterson, and her singing with the University Choir were parts of her life she came to relish.

Moya enjoyed being a gadfly and she loved to shock. She insisted on keeping her family name at a time when this was unusual. She was a forthright feminist and championed ceremonies that celebrated womanhood. Many of her women friends attended her crowning in April, 1996, where womanhood and ageing became a time for joyful celebration. Moya was a questioning Catholic and was critical of all hierarchies. Her funeral, many aspects of which she planned, was conducted by women and included a ceremony to cleanse the church of 'the sin of patriarchy'. Moya asked that in lieu of flowers, contributions be given to Awabakal Neighbour Aid, a project for a cultural centre for Aboriginal Elders. She would have been delighted to know that over \$2,000 was contributed by her friends and relatives to this project.

Prior to her brief stay at the Hospice, Moya was able to be at home for two months with Bob, their three children, and other relatives and friends who came to be with her and support her. These people were welcomed to her bedside and she spoke to them with a joy and enthusiasm which sent them away with tasks to perform and an unexpected feeling of exhilaration.

Moya was honoured in Newcastle first with the Peggy Hill Peace Award in 1987 and with the City of Newcastle Medal in 1999. Her own words, in an article by Jane Worthington in *The Newcastle Herald* (16/2/98), reveal her as a prophet with an unusual sense of joyfulness. Speaking of the possibility of bringing about a just peace with



Aboriginal people she said, 'If we link up with each other we can do that. That's what I've learnt as a peace activist and it's helped me with cancer, so in that way I'm sort of ahead. A person could live to be a hundred and not have half the fun I've had.'



Zeny Giles

100 Carrington Parade
New Lambton 2305
Tel: (02) 4957 1466

Moya

Toward the end of her life, I had the enormous privilege of getting to know Ms Moya Farrell, just a little bit better. This occurred initially, due to a visit to the John Hunter Hospital that I made with the CEO of our AMS (Ray Kelly) to see her a couple of months ago.

Obviously Moya was quite ill but she was so happy to see us, and after what seemed only seconds of our time spent addressing her illness, she immediately created a fire of enthusiasm over our intended new Awabakal Elders Day Facility. Moya asked us a myriad of questions concerning the status of the proposed facility, becoming a reality for our people. Questions such as

"Why isn't it being built?"

"What is the hold up?"

"Who have we been dealing with at council?"

Ray and I were so utterly moved by Moya's lack of concern about her own sickness and her prioritising this community issue at this time in her life. I am also aware that Ray Kelly enjoyed some really special times with Moya after this visit to the hospital and spoke of how even in death she remained productive. Moya immediately began helping us the best way she could from her hospital bed.

I contacted her dear husband Bob, about this and made sure it was ok with him but he assured me that Moya was bored with contemplating her death and indeed he supported her involvement in community affairs at this time. Moya set about making contact with relevant people who could help our cause. She also dictated letters to council informing them of pertinent knowledge she had that was in our favour regarding drainage etc.

I returned to see Moya on quite a few occasions, and telephoned her with updated information about where the Development Application was 'in the system'.

I came to admire Moya very much, as a woman who truly lived out her beliefs. I saw also, that by doing this it did not take away Moya's strength to fight her inner medical battle. Indeed I saw a radiance on her face as we spoke together and every time I left her I marvelled at her courage.

Moya spoke to me about her wish, that at her funeral the money that would normally be spent on flowers, be donated toward the Elders facility. It was easier for me to agree to her request than actually perform the duties necessary on the day.

Moya's funeral was such a celebration of her life but my heart was sad knowing that my special times meeting with her were now over.

I am pleased to thank all Moya's family and friends who respected her wish and pass on the information that \$ 2045.00 has been donated toward the Elders Facility so far in honour of Moya.

Personally, I cannot finish writing, without making mention of Moya's beautiful coffin. I have always loathed coffins but this one was so original and different and such a lovely resting place for her.

We, at the Awabakal Co-op also honour Moya for her life's work. Our activities area in the new building will be called the Moya Farrell Room.

Hopefully, the Awabakal Elders HACC Facility will be a reality before the year 2000 ends and just know ahead of time that you are all invited to celebrate with us at the opening.

***Thank you all — from Moya's friend Bev Chapman
and staff of the Awabakal Co-operative***

Vale Moya

We are greatly saddened by Moya's death. Her strong and vibrant presence will be sorely missed by us all. We admired Moya's courage and tenacity in fighting her illness. We hoped and believed that she was winning that fight...but that is the cruelty of cancer. Moya cared for those who were struggling with disadvantage and gave generously of her time, to help, in any way she could. But Moya's greatest strength lay in her insight into the history of injustice perpetrated against Aboriginal and Islander peoples; she continually sought ways in which to address these issues in practical and meaningful terms.

To her husband Bob and children Brendan, Marny and Ras, and to her family, we send our deepest sympathy .

Bob recently remarked, how much Moya would have enjoyed marching across the bridge at Corroboree 2000. I would guess her spirit was certainly there, with her family on that day.

On behalf of all our members.

Anne Too

Wollotuka Graduation Celebrations

What a delightful event this was, another one of those bright relaxed occasions we have come to expect from Wollatuka. A crowd of happy students, their relatives and well-wishers filled the hall with laughter as they greeted and congratulated each other. It was a true meeting place of friends, both old and new.

After acknowledging the Awabakal owners of this place, the Director of Wollotuka, Laurel Williams, welcomed everyone especially the students and their families.

Jean Talbot then gave a short talk on the Jack Doherty scholarship scheme, and the need to keep working to expand the scheme further. She then asked Louise Campbell to present the scholarships to this year's recipients.

Louise, who is the head of Aboriginal Studies in the Catholic school system of Newcastle and Maitland, told us that as one of the Stolen Children she arrived in the Hunter at the age of eleven, and grew up knowing nothing of her people until she met a gentleman who taught her about their history and culture. From that time she threw herself into the cause, spending time at the Tent Embassy with our old friends John Heath and Michael Davidson and eventually meeting up with Jack Doherty. He convinced her of the need for an educated Aboriginal society who could speak out for themselves in this modern society. Hence her pleasure in presenting the Jack Doherty awards to the following :

1. James Tabuai - Bachelor of Teaching / Bachelor of Arts
2. Michael Pearson - Bachelor of Aboriginal Studies
3. Terrilee Amatto - Bachelor of Aboriginal Studies
4. Elizabeth McEntyre - Bachelor of Social Work

Then we were introduced to two visitors from Muswellbrook, Barry French an Elder from the Wonaruah Land Council, and the Deputy Mayor of Muswellbrook, Robyn Tozer. Barry presented a cheque for \$1000 to the Scholarship fund on behalf of the two organisations. We are delighted to have met these two people who travelled so far bearing such a wonderful gift and we have promised to keep in touch.

Lucy Kelly was presented with the Ken Brindell Scholarship. This is a State wide scholarship and by winning it, Lucy not only brings honour to herself and her family but adds to the reputation of Wollotuka.

Val Bryant-Carrol was presented with an honorary Doctorate in Medicine, another graduate reflecting her well-earned glory onto her Alma Mater.

Laurel then spoke of the 28 graduates going through this year in 15 courses throughout the University. As she called them out for the presentation of their Diplomas and Certificates she told us about them, their home towns, their personalities and their hopes for the future. It was a fascinating look at these bright young people who come from as far afield as Broome, Darwin, and Cairns as well as students from the Hunter and from many northern and western NSW towns. It was also an insight into the relaxed and friendly atmosphere at this University and the close interaction between these students and their Director of Studies.

The afternoon finished with a sumptuous afternoon tea. Congratulations to the students and thank you Laurel and the Wollotuka staff for such an inspiring event.

Pat Keating

Auntie Isabel Flick: an 'Old Warrior' dies

This is the heading of the obituary of Isabel Flick in *Friends of Tranby* newsletter, March/April 2000. Isabel Flick died at Collarenebri on 1 February 2000. Her brother Joe summed up his sister by saying: "She was an 'old warrior', that's what you can say about her ..."

Giving the Eulogy at her funeral in Collarenebri, Heather Goodall said: "Isabel had a number of projects which she really wanted to get underway, projects that linked land and community through the history of people's experiences and memories. She has been recording her memories with me for a book which will still go ahead because she wanted those stories told."

"Isabel was a Gamilaraay woman. She was born at Goondiwindi, but when young her father returned to Collarenebri to escape Queensland Government policies, which were separating and destroying Aboriginal families. When they came into Collarenebri township, Isabel and her brother Joe found they were not allowed into the local school. Collarenebri Public School was 'public' only if you were white. The racial segregation at this school was common across the state and stayed in place in reality for decades. In 1938 the police told Isabel's family that their children would be taken away if they were not enrolled in a school somewhere. So Isabel and Joe were sent to their granny, Jane Clevens at Toomelah Protection Board Station, where they could be enrolled at the 'special' poor quality and segregated 'Aboriginal' school there. So Isabel's experience of school education was a sad one.

But she grew up passionate about learning and about teaching.

As a young woman she sought out older people who could teach her about her language and traditions, and she persisted in her requests until they were convinced that she seriously wanted to learn. She was determined too that her children and nieces and nephews would have a happier experience of white schooling than she had. So she became a regular visitor to the school, speaking up for the family and challenging the teachers to treat them fairly. When Isabel took a job as a cleaner in that school during the 1960s, her real role was as an advocate and spokesperson for all the Murri kids there. They would tell her

Newcastle Aboriginal Support Group...

was formed in September 1980. It meets bi-monthly and sends out a newsletter shortly before each meeting. Membership of the Support Group is open to all who share its objectives:

- Promoting better understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.
- Giving support to initiatives proposed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups both locally and nationally.

Contacts for NASG

Yamuloong

Lorraine 4946 8417 Sue 4942 4207

Jack Doherty Scholarships:

Jean 4957 5562 Zeni 4957 1466

NASG Finances:

Lyndall 4969 7965

Koori History Awareness:

Pat K. 4928 2837

Editing Wurreker:

Anne 4929 1123 Pat K. 4928 2837

Pat C. 4920 1642

General Enquiries, Subscriptions:

Rodney 4963 6143

the playground and classroom problems they couldn't tell the teachers and she would take their part, speaking up for them to voice their concerns, negotiating with the teachers and demanding a fair go for the Aboriginal students.

During her life Isabel devoted herself to building confidence and challenging people to learn more. She was the initiator of many organisations, from Mangankali Housing company onwards, and in each of them, she looked out for young people whom she could draw in so they could learn by doing. She loved not only to support people but to challenge them with new jobs, supporting them while they found new skills and strengths they didn't know they had.

She did this so successfully because she brought the tradition of teaching round the fire and on the riverbank....the tradition of teaching side by side. And she gave it generously in a life process to all those she taught.

She didn't just change events in her life, Isabel changed people. Inspiring them, challenging them, nurturing them, so that we all found that we could do things we hadn't known were possible until she encouraged us all to try."

This extract from the eulogy covers only one aspect of her work and life, areas to which she devoted equal passion were justice and equality, the needs of women and children, belonging to land, and community and family.

Education was just one of the passions of Isabel Flick. It is as a direct result of the passion of men and women like Isabel, that we have young Aboriginal people graduating as in the recent Newcastle University - Wollatuka Graduation. The Sydney Morning Herald of 16/5/00 featured Aboriginal graduates in all the professions and arts. The Sun-Herald of 21/5/00 carries an interview with 17 year old Alan Clarke a

student in communications at University of Technology where he voices his aspirations for his people and for himself. Alan is a young man from Bourke, Isabel would be proud.

Concluding the Eulogy, Goodall says, "The other essential parts of her legacy were her principles, which were absolutely unshakeable no matter what the cost to herself. Her generosity, in things, ideas and in feelings. Her determination, and her courage, which was unflinching.

All these things were, I think, what she meant by "Staying Solid. "That's what I think she will want us all to try to do."

Pat Cameron



continued from page 1

the Aboriginal culture could form a common core uniting all the diverse migratory groups and their differing beliefs. All of us who came after 1888 must cherish this culture and allow it to grow and flourish. Otherwise our apologies are empty and we will never rest easy in a stolen land.

Pat Keating



Our next meeting: 7.30 pm Wednesday 28 June 2000 at Wollotuka

There will be three speakers.

Deirdre Heitmeyer will talk about the meaning of coexistence and the place of a treaty.

Sharon Claydon speaks about meetings with people such as Pat Dodson.

Michael Davison introduces his 'Didge' CD to us.

Everybody is welcome and a cuppa is provided.



Membership Subscription Form

Members of the NASG receive the bi-monthly NASG newsletter, Wurreker, and agree to support the stated objectives of the NASG.

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Bits and Pieces

Historic Traps

Ancient Aboriginal fish traps, built in a rock bar in the Barwon River at Brewarrina, are likely to be listed on the State Heritage Register. Planning Minister Andrew Refshauge is calling for public comment on the proposed listing.

They are among only four surviving trap sites in NSW, and are the only ones still intact in a complex arrangement of traps and walls nearly 500 metres long.

Stories associated with the traps are found across western NSW and they are depicted in artwork as far afield as Cobar.

Dr Refshauge said it was a priority to add Aboriginal places to the Heritage Register and to involve local Aborigines in managing the site and its surrounds.

Extract: from *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Saturday 3 June 2000, (Urban Eyes) page 10, by Geraldine O'Brien

Dominicans for Reconciliation

Recently attending a reunion at my old school, St Mary's Dominican Convent, Maitland I learnt that there would be a group of Dominican nuns joining Corroboree 2000 to walk across the Harbour Bridge.

Anne Too

Elections at our annual general meeting

President : Anne Too. Vice-President: Pat Keating. Secretary: Rodney Knock. Treasurer: Lyndall Coan. Scholarships: Jean Talbot. Yamuloong Project: Lorraine Robertson. Willing assistants and advisers: Stan Masterson, Pat Cameron, Sharon Claydon, Laurel Williams, Louise Campbell and Donna Meehan.

Membership fees

Anyone confused about membership fees please ring Rodney Knock.

Leadership

In an article in *The Australian* of 7/3/00, Peter Yu of the Kimberley Land Council, said that when the PM said reconciliation would not be achieved by the centenary of Federation 'he ducked the first challenge', adding 'change is difficult to realise if leadership is absent'.

Acknowledgment

Thankyou to all involved in the production of this newsletter, to Anna Kaemmerling especially for her time.

Anne Too

YAPUG

Congratulations to Luita Casey, who is the first to graduate in Yapug, (it means 'pass' in the Awabakal language). Luita is the first student to complete the Yapug course at Newcastle University. Yapug helps Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. It is an enabling course for these students to gain skills for entry into one of the health professions. More details about Yapug will be available in our next newsletter.

NAIDOC Week

Monday, 3 July, 9.30 am – flag raising at Christ Church Cathedral, then march through city to Civic Park, where speeches, dancers, flag raising on City Hall. Afternoon: sausage sizzle at Durungarling (Lambton) Opening of children's playground at Warlangurra Women's Refuge, Wallsend.

Tuesday, 4 July – march and raising of flag on Lake Macquarie Council Chambers. Family barbecue at Speers Point Park. Open day at Yamuloong. Aboriginal 'Gateway' web site launch (invitations only). Evening: Under 18 disco Gospel night at Westlakes Christian Assembly, Toronto.

Wednesday, 5 July – tennis/sports day, at Teralba tennis courts and football oval. Elders luncheon.

Thursday, 6 July – touch football, Wallsend touch field.

Friday, 7 July – bowls day at Buttaba Sports Club.

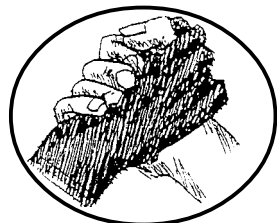
Saturday, 8 July – evening – NAIDOC dance and talent quest at Cardiff Workers' Club.

For further details ring Ray Kelly on (02) 4956 8288.

If you do not wish to continue receiving this newsletter, please return to:
Newcastle Aboriginal Support Group
PO Box 79
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